

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 26, 2020

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor
Office of Governor Ron DeSantis
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis:

As Members of Congress, we write to follow-up on a previous letter sent March 17, 2020, in which you were urged to address Florida's inadequate unemployment benefits and take critical steps to protect Floridians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We recognize that you submitted a request for a major disaster declaration to the President in order to grant Floridians access to disaster unemployment assistance. However, we again request that you immediately improve Florida's unemployment insurance and ease the burdensome application requirements that are preventing Floridians from accessing critical benefits at a moment of crisis.

COVID-19 has already forced Florida businesses to lay off a staggering 40,438 workers – 31,246 temporarily and 9,192 permanently. In the last week alone, the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity received 5,325 applications for reemployment assistance, and over 130,000 calls. These numbers will only increase as the virus continues to spread and businesses close.

Yet Florida has one of the weakest unemployment compensation programs in the country and inexplicably still has onerous requirements to receive benefits. This includes requiring workers to meet stringent job search requirements and demonstrate that they are actively searching for work *during* the pandemic. Florida also continues to impose a waiting period of one week where no benefits are paid and insists on using an obsolete formula for determining eligibility that disregards a worker's most recent quarter of earnings. Furthermore, we continue to hear from constituents that the website where all applications must be completed, continues to malfunction making it extremely difficult for individuals to even file a claim for unemployment benefits. Finally – but critically – we are concerned that Florida provides only twelve weeks of unemployment insurance and has capped the benefit at \$275/week, which is severely inadequate.

While Congress is working on a new legislative package that will add an additional \$600/week of Federal unemployment benefits for up to four months, given the likely severity of unemployment rates in Florida and the deep cuts to individual pocketbooks, we urge you to:

1. Waive burdensome job search requirements and communicate such waivers to the public;
2. Waive the one week waiting period;
3. Increase the maximum amount for payments and duration of unemployment benefits;
4. Update the formula to determine eligibility and consider a worker's most recent quarter of earnings to calculate the benefit;
5. Investigate and mitigate challenges with the website; and
6. Provide additional ways for individuals to apply for unemployment insurance.

Our offices are ready to assist you with these efforts and other COVID-19 responses in any way necessary.

Sincerely,



Lois Frankel
Member of Congress

/s/
Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Charlie Crist
Member of Congress

Val B. Demings
Member of Congress

Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Al Lawson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress

Donna Shalala
Member of Congress

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

Frederica Wilson
Member of Congress